

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 106 (2013) 2044 – 2050

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

4th International Conference on New Horizons in Education

Perfection at the University, in the Opinion of Students

Justyna Truskolaska^{*a}, Magdalena Łuka^b^a*The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, The Off-Campus Faculty of Social Sciences, Ofiar Katynia 6a, 37-450 Stalowa Wola, Poland*^b*The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, The Off-Campus Faculty of Social Sciences, Ofiar Katynia 6a, 37-450 Stalowa Wola, Poland*

Abstract

The article shows what is perfection, especially at the university, in the opinion of students of the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland. The students pointed to several aspects of perfection - ontological, moral and aesthetic. Excellence at the university was described by four basic categories: fulfillment of obligations (both by students and teachers), the good atmosphere (of whole academic community), adequate conditions (material, organizational and didactic), as well as the reputation of the university and the achievement of its mission. Item is part of studies on education in higher school, carried out by the authors since 2008.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology-TASET, Sakarya Universitesi, Turkey.

Keywords: education; university; students; perfection

1. Introduction

This article aims to answer the question what is perfection at the university, in the opinion of students of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. First we answer the question what is perfection. The term is most often explained in philosophy and pedagogy – in this context, we define it in this article. We rely on classical concept of perfection, according to Zofia Zdybicka and Karol Wojtyła, as well as on the pedagogical approach taken by Janusz Tarnowski. The main part of the paper is to present a written students' works about the excellence, especially in the context of higher education and their interpretation in the light of the presented concept of perfection. The research material was obtained in 2012, from two groups of students of pedagogy at the Catholic University of Lublin (a total of fifty-one people). The article also refers to research on the culture of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +48 660 799 593; fax: +48 15 842 49 51.

E-mail address: justyna.truskolaska@kul.pl

higher school and university education, which were conducted by the authors of this article in 2008 and 2010, among the students and teachers of three higher schools.

2. Understanding of excellence in classical philosophy and pedagogy – the selected approaches

Zofia Zdybicka, a known Polish philosopher, dealing with metaphysics, ethics, and philosophy of God and religion, creating on the basis of classical Thomistic philosophy, describes excellence in three areas: ontic, moral, and aesthetic. So it is a recognition of excellence as a being, an act or a values. Excellence of being (ontic) can take two forms: hierarchically higher being (relative to lower being) and the actualisation of ontic potentiality (the act). The highest perfection is the highest being – the absolute – in the ontic aspect – it is "pure act, act of existence, the existence itself" (Zdybicka, 1985: 146). Perfection is a feature of absolut what inheres in it in full swing, but it inheres in the other beings only in an analogous manner. Perfection of being is revealed in the act or action directed at goal - the value of good.

Therefore, the ontic aspect of perfection is closely connected with the moral aspect. Moral perfection is the realization of value – in Aristotle, excellence is the realization of potentiality of being consistent with the nature of being (*optimum potentiae*). According to Immanuel Kant perfection is the realization of moral obligation, in accordance with the principle "proceed so that your actions could be a model for others" (Zdybicka, 1985: 147). The Christian perfection is imitation of God, thanks to love for Him and by His grace (Woroniecki, 1984).

By Zdybicka (1985: 147) perfection can also be aesthetic value "one of the three objective factors of beauty (*integritas*) as a feature of a finished, coherent whole."

Karol Wojtyła discusses in detail the concepts of excellence on ancient philosophy (Plato, Aristotle), medieval philosophy (St. Augustine, St. Thomas) and contemporary philosophy (Immanuel Kant and Max Scheler) in work "Wykłady Lubelskie" (Wojtyła, 1986: 99, 104-5, 107, 122-3, 198-9).

Janusz Tarnowski describes perfection from the perspective of personalistic and existential pedagogy (Sliwowski, 2010: 69). His point of view is very close to Wojtyła's approach. Tarnowski believes that perfection, and properly striving for it, is necessary in education, and it relates primarily to educators and teachers. The man - both teacher and pupil - should exceed himself in every moment of his life and "the measure of his development is infinity" (Tarnowski, 1992: 143). A teacher, that starts upbringing from himself, can become an authority and a role model for pupils. The children start to imitate the teacher and they are inspired by personal dialogue with him or her. These pupils try to be more perfect and take responsibility for themselves and their development, but it is a gradual and lengthy process. Even though the education is based on the authority of the teacher, it can not be based on the authoritarian relationship. This understanding of excellence in upbringing is particularly important at the university, where we are dealing with young people who want to have personal role models, but they are also able to think critically about their university and their teachers.

3. Methodology of the research

The present study is a continuation of the research conducted by the authors in 2008 and 2010 among students and teachers of university and higher schools. Studies in 2008 and 2010 were related to the culture of the university and to education at the university and at the higher school. The aim of the present study was to answer the question: what is perfection, especially at the university, in the opinion of students of the Catholic University of Lublin. Statements of 51 students of pedagogy (II and IV year full-time) were collected to answer the research question. The statements were written completely arbitrary and had two parts. They provided the answer to the question, "What is your opinion on perfection, and especially what is perfection at the university?" The statements were collected in November 2012. The collected comments were categorized. Then the categories were grouped into four types: "honest fulfilling the obligations", "atmosphere at the university and meeting the needs", "material, organizational and didactical conditions" and "mission and reputation of the university."

Subsequently the responses were counted. The result of calculations and conclusions arising from them are presented in next section.

4. Results of the research

Before we get to discuss in detail the results of research on students' opinions about the perfection at the university, we will answer the initial, basic question – how do students specify the concept of perfection. This was the first part of their expressions. The students often stated that perfection is: "an ideal pattern", "something above the norm", "ideality", "being perfect", "being the best", "excellence", "precision in execution", "aiming for the objective", "the realization of a value". At the same time, many respondents marked that nothing was perfect, and a perfect man did not exist, but almost all people strived for perfection. Although perfection could be understood variously by different people. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that there were different sides of perfection such as: the perfection of behavior, professional excellence (professionalism), aesthetic perfection (excellent work of art, the perfection of appearance – beauty, fashion clothes).

Voices about the negative side of perfection also appeared in several pronouncements. The young people said that a "excellent" person could be cocky and could treat patronizing the others. Students emphasized that the pursuit of excellence can be done at the expense of other people, and even at the expense of your own health. Thus, the students probably wanted to draw attention to the negative (social and health) consequences of perfectionism. The abovementioned statements testify to the fact that the respondents perceive the category of excellence: 1. in ontological sens, as a being ("model", "ideal") or as an act ("realisation of himself", "aim to something", "achievement of an aim"), 2. in ethical sens ("good behaviour", "be a better man"), as well as 3. in aesthetic aspect (realization the value of beauty).

Perfection at the university was understood differently by respondents, but we can clearly identify certain categories of expression – at the same time – the categories of understanding. The first one, called conventionally "good fulfilling the duties", is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Perfection at the university as good fulfilling the duties

Symbol	Description	Number of choices
1.	Good fulfilling the duties	in total: 91
1.1.	by lecturers - skillful transfer of knowledge, a high level of education, improving teaching methods	18
1.2.	by students – conscientious fulfillment of obligations, such as preparation for classes and exams	21
1.3.	motivating to work, developing the students' interests, putting the requirements	15
1.4.	individual attention of lecturer to students	1
1.5.	execution of work in accordance with his or her conscience	5
1.6.	gaining knowledge necessary for living and working	10
1.7.	good, planned teaching and learning	7
1.8.	improvement and self-realization	14

Table 1. collects students' statements directly related to the first category: "good fulfilling the duties". The respondents understand it in particular as: good performing the duties by students (21 responses), as well as by lecturers (18 responses), which includes, among others: skillful transfer of knowledge, a high level of teaching,

improving of teaching methods, professionalism and individual treatment of students. Developing students' interest, motivating to work, putting high demands are farther elements of perfection at the university (in the aspects of performance of duties) – according to the respondents (15 responses). Both sides of the educational process (lecturers and students) should still improve the work at the university (14 responses), they should all the time acquire the knowledge necessary for living and working (10 indications, primarily relating to youth), properly plan the teaching and learning (7 indications) and conscientiously perform their duties (5 voices). This attitude of students and teachers is – in the opinion of the respondents – the same as the striving for perfection. However, they also pointed to another important element in improving the university, which is the right atmosphere. It is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Perfection at the university, as an appropriate atmosphere and meeting needs

Symbol	Description	Number of choices
2.	Atmosphere and meeting needs	in total: 79
2.1.	good atmosphere - good interpersonal relationships	17
2.2.	respect for others, honesty	8
2.3.	caring for the welfare of students and staff	10
2.4.	justice, fairness	2
2.5.	openness	6
2.6.	understanding the needs and difficult situations	10
2.7.	helping people from outside the university e.g. as volunteer	6
2.8.	support for students	8
2.9.	organizing free time in collaboration with the local community	1
2.10.	students' help for the university e.g. the organization of conferences	4
2.11.	good communication between staff and students	7

Table 2. shows the components of the right atmosphere at the university, which is an essential component of university perfection. The proper atmosphere – by students – includes: good interpersonal relationships (17 responses), caring for the welfare of staff and students (10 responses), understanding the difficult situations of students, such as the need of paid work and the need of raising children (10 responses). Respondents also pointed out the need for mutual respect and integrity in the academic community (8 responses) appropriate assistance to students (8 answers), especially those in difficult situations. However, tested youth also saw need of helping people by students (a total of 10 responses), both within the university (e.g. by organization conferences, in scientific circles) and outside the university (e.g. within volunteering). The respondents note that efficient communication (7 responses), openness of university (6 responses) and justice (2 answers) were also the elements of perfection at the university. Only one person pointed out the importance of organizing leisure activities e.g. by students together with local authorities.

The next category of students' statements which has been singled out by the authors, is "material, organizational and personnel conditions." Table 3. presents a number of choices particular components of this category.

Table 3. Perfection at the university as material, organizational and personnel conditions

Symbol	Description	Number of choices
3.	Material, organizational and personnel conditions	in total: 42
3.1.	the material conditions - dormitory, classrooms	14
3.2.	early information about changes	3
3.3.	efficient handling matters - good organization	4
3.4.	clearly defined rules of study and exams	3
3.5.	good library	1
3.6.	providing qualified staff	13
3.7.	good organization of classes	4

As can be seen above (Table 3.), the students attach the greatest importance to ensuring good material conditions (14 responses), including: neat dormitories, nice classrooms and modern, properly equipped buildings. However, the qualified staff is in second place (13 responses). Less people found that the effective handling matters (4 answers) and the good organization of the course (4 answers) are important. Only three people recognize that the part of perfect functioning of the university were also clearly defined rules of study (including passing exams), and timely information about changes (e.g. in the class schedule). Only one person draws attention to the fact that students should have access to a good library.

The respondents found that reputation of the university and fulfilling its mission is the last component of university perfection (Table 4.).

Table 4. Perfection at the university as realization of its mission and as taking care about the reputation of the university

Symbol	Description	Number of choices
4.	Mission and reputation of the university	in total: 8
4.1.	realization of university mission	1
4.2.	taking care about university reputation	4
4.3.	patriotism	1
4.4.	high place in the ranking	2

Table 4. indicates that only eight people pay attention in their statements on the need of taking care about reputation of the university (4 subjects), obtaining high place in rankings (2 subjects), accomplishment of university mission (one person), and patriotism as the value of academic community (one person).

The last, summary table shows how many choices were given to each of four categories described above.

Table 5. Categories which are synonymous with perfection at the university - in the opinion of students – summary

No.	Description	Number of choices	
		N	%
1.	Good fulfilling the duties	91	41
2.	Atmosphere and meeting needs	79	36
3.	Material, organizational and personnel conditions	42	19
4.	Mission and reputation of the university	8	4

The most important to achieve perfection at the university seems to be honest (consistent with a conscience) performing the duties – students describe it in different places as much as 91 times (41% of responses). Students describe the atmosphere at the university and meeting the needs of members of the community as the second major category – they indicate it 79 times (36% of responses). Less important in the development of university perfection seem to be material and organizational conditions – together with personnel conditions – they received 42 indications (19%). The latter can be also attributed to the first category – proper performance of duties, because the good staff is the honestly working staff. In this situation, the first category got even more number of choices. And – as we can see above – shaping the reputation of the university and fulfilling its mission were mentioned only 8 times (4% of responses), they seem to be the least important to students.

5. Comparative analysis of the research results on culture and education in higher school (2008-2010) and the research results on perfection at the university (2012)

In 2008 and 2010 the authors of this article conducted surveys on culture and education in higher school in three Polish higher schools (Łuka, Truskolaska, 2009; Łuka, Truskolaska, 2011). The first part of the study (2008) refers to the opinion of students (208 respondents), while the statements of lecturers (71 respondents) were analyzed in the second part of the study (2010). The results from both parts of the study clearly show teachers as a very important group shaping the culture of higher education, in the opinion of students and lecturers. The majority opinion points to the fact that the important role of the academic teacher is not only 'practicing' science at a high level, but also: setting a good example for students, carrying out good teaching, implementation of educational mission of the university. The research described in this article, and carried out in 2012, supports this view, pointing to the need of good fulfilling duties by the academic staff (see Table 1.).

Those who shape the culture of the university – according to the opinions from 2008 and 2010 – are all staff and students. The current research on perfection at the university, also emphasizes the important role of good performance of their duties by the students. They understand it as: solid preparation for classes and examinations, acquiring the knowledge necessary for life and work, as well as the assistance provided by students at the university and help people outside the university.

The subjects in 2008 and 2010 indicate that one of the most important elements of a culture of the school is implementation of the value in everyday life through behavior in relation to other members of the academic community. Similarly, students by formulating their opinions on the excellence at the university in 2012, emphasize the need of a positive attitude of students to teachers and vice versa, as well as the need to meet their needs and helping each other.

The students in the study in 2008 indicate that teachers contributed to the deepening of knowledge, but subjects also underline lecturers' contribution to shaping friendly atmosphere on campus through e.g. fairness, openness, and good communication. The research conducted in 2012 also shows the important role of building a positive climate and the proper interpersonal relations in creating perfection at the university. Students emphasized – like their colleagues four years earlier – that a good atmosphere, proper communication and perception of the individual needs of students is important in shaping perfection at the university. It seems that the statements of students from 2008 and 2012 and the statements of lecturers from 2010 confirm each other - the interviewed show similar aspects of culture of higher education, and the striving for perfection at the university.

6. Conclusions

It was found, in the second section of this article, that perfection in philosophy is often understood as a goal-oriented action, and the good is the goal of the action. Our research shows that the students similarly understand

the term of perfection. At the same time, the subjects – who contribute to create academic community – point to the need to strive for excellence at the university. They point to four key elements that allow for development of perfection: the conscientious fulfillment of obligations, appropriate atmosphere, suitable conditions for studying (material, organizational and personnel) and taking care about reputation of the university. The students emphasize necessity of engaging both students and lecturers in good job at the university. The opinions expressed in the study are congruent with the approach of Father Janusz Tarnowski – described in the first part of the article. Tarnowski emphasizes the need of continuous improvement of educators and teachers. Their examples attract youth, they become personal model for young people, who also want to be better and better.

These results are consistent with the research results from 2008 and 2010, carried out by the authors. They indicate what areas are most important in shaping the culture of higher education and striving for excellence at the university – in the opinion of our students and lecturers. Thus, it seems that the results of our study have not only theoretical, but also practical connotation.

References

Łuka, M., Truskolaska, J. (2009). Rola nauczycieli akademickich w kształtowaniu kultury szkoły wyższej w opinii studentów KUL i PWSZ w Białej Podlaskiej. In E. Augustyniak (Ed.), *Kultura organizacyjna szkoły* (pp. 81-88). Kraków: Uczelniane Wydawnictwa Naukowo-Dydaktyczne AGH.

Łuka, M., Truskolaska, J. (2011). Rola nauczycieli akademickich w kształtowaniu kultury uczelni w opinii wykładowców wybranego uniwersytetu i szkół wyższych. In E. Augustyniak (Ed.), *Kultura organizacyjna szkoły rozwijającej się* (pp. 105-111). Kraków: Wydawnictwa AGH.

Śliwerski, W. (2010). *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.

Tarnowski, J. (1992). Pedagogika dialogu. In B. Śliwerski (Ed.), *Edukacja alternatywna – dylematy teorii i praktyki* (pp.143-149). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.

Tatarkiewicz, W. (1976). *O doskonałości*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe.

Wojtyła, K. (1986). *Wykłady lubelskie*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.

Woroniecki, J. (1986). *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza*. T. 2/1, Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.

Zdybicka, Z. (1985). Doskonałość. In *Encyklopedia Katolicka*. T. 4. (pp. 146-147). Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.